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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 000520

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TAGS: PGOV PHUM CH

SUBJECT: PRO-REFORM JOURNAL DIRECTOR REPLACED, POLITICAL CLOUD WANING

REF: A. 08 BEIJING 4644

¶B. BEIJING 303

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Aubrey Carlson. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

¶1. (C) In response to renewed pressure from central authorities, the envelope-pushing pro-reform journal Yanhuang Chunqiu has removed its director, Du Daozheng, according to an Embassy contact with direct access to Du and other journal managers. The journal resisted pressure to purge Du in November 2008 (ref A) but no longer enjoys the political protection it once had due to the death last year of its patron, influential retired General Xiao Ke. Former Party chief Jiang Zemin is behind the firing, our contact says, because of longstanding personal enmity with former party head Zhao Ziyang, whose political accomplishments were touted last year in several journal articles. End summary.

Du Fired as Director, Retains Editorial Control

¶2. (C) Following increased pressure from central authorities over the past two months, the governing board of the pro-reform history journal Yanhuang Chunqiu (informal translation: "Annals of the Chinese Nation") has removed prominent media figure Du Daozheng as the journal's director (shezhang). Li Nanyang (strictly protect), daughter of influential retired senior Party official Li Rui, told PolOff on February 25 that Du, together with editor-in-chief Wu Si, had confirmed to her the day before in the journal's office that Wu would replace Du as director and remain as chief editor. Wu reportedly said, however, that Du would remain as head of the editorial board and that the journal's style and envelope-pushing reform agenda would not change.

¶3. (C) Several positive articles in the journal last year on former Party chief Zhao Ziyang (purged after the military crackdown on demonstrators in Tiananmen Square in 1989) had angered retired Party head Jiang Zemin and Party hardliners, according to our contact. (Note: Public discussion of Zhao remains a taboo subject in China. These pieces followed a number of highly sensitive pieces that appeared in the journal over the past three years (ref A). Du, the former head of the government's media watchdog, the State Administration of Press and Publications (guojia xinwen chuban zongshu), is the guiding hand of the journal and had heretofore seemingly been beyond political attack because of his stature in the Party.)

¶4. (C) According to Li, Wu told her that although Wu and Du, with the backing of her father Li Rui, had been able to resist the Ministry of Culture's first directive to fire Du last November (ref A), it was no longer possible to do so. Since its original effort, the Ministry of Culture had sent two more directives ordering the journal to take action

against Du, and the Party's Central Committee General Office had issued a directive just before the Chinese New Year forbidding retired Party officials to run journals. Moreover, the journal had lost its primary political patron, influential retired General Xiao Ke, the journal's founder, when Xiao died last year. (Note: Radio Free Asia reported on February 9 that Xiao died in October 2008.) Finally, the pressure to fire Du and bring the journal into line was coming from former Party Chief Jiang Zemin.

¶ 15. (C) Li Nanyang said she was not aware of any other journals under the direction of retired senior cadres and interpreted the General Office directive as simply a cover for getting rid of Du. By contrast, two senior editors of other publications told PolOffs that age was a factor in Du's stepping down. Guangming Ribao editor Dong Yuyu (protect) seemed unaware of the political significance behind Du's removal, saying on February 19 that he thought Du had been "retired" simply because of his "advancing age." However, Wang Wen (protect), editor of the "international forum" page of the popular international news tabloid Huangqiu Shibao, said age was a factor but implied that this was mainly a political excuse. In Wang's view, there would be a "successor generation" to Du and Yanhuang Chunqiu was not going to be shut down the way the prominent pro-reform magazine "Strategy and Management" was closed several years ago for political reasons. He also said there was a new internal journal at Beijing University called "China and the World Review" that was pushing the envelope in the same manner.

Journal's Diminished Clout a "Danger" for Wu?

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¶ 16. (C) The death last year of General Xiao Ke had dealt a crippling blow to the journal's ability to fend off pressure from Party hardliners, according to Li Nanyang. Hu jintao's prior order to not harass senior retired cadres (ref A) protected Du from future "arrest," she said, but not Wu Si. As the journal's director and chief editor, Wu was now "very vulnerable" to future attacks by Jiang or hardliners. In fact, Li said, Wu was in a very "dangerous" situation and had to be "very careful."

¶ 17. (C) Li said that her father, Li Rui, along with Du and Wu, had wanted to sign the "Charter 08" document on human rights (ref B), but did not dare push their luck. In fact, Li Rui, who in the past had enjoyed direct access to the Politburo Standing Committee, was now required to submit to the Central Organization Department for approval all of his communications to Zhongnanhai, a step which Li Nanyang attributed to hard-line forces hoping to counter Li Rui's influence.

Jiang Zemin Vendetta

¶ 18. (C) Li Nanyang said her sources had confirmed earlier rumors among Embassy contacts and in Western media that Jiang Zemin was behind the effort to fire Du and put political pressure on the journal. According to these sources, Li said, Jiang's action did not indicate a "factional conflict" within the current PRC leadership but rather was a "personal vendetta" against (the now-deceased) Zhao Ziyang. Jiang Zemin "hates" Zhao, she said, because Zhao had severely criticized Jiang during the student protests of 1989. Zhao allegedly denounced Jiang for closing the pro-reform Shanghai newspaper Shijie Jingji Baodao (World Economic Herald) during student demonstrations in Shanghai in 1989 when Jiang was Party Secretary of the city. (Note: Jiang replaced Zhao as Party General Secretary at the Party's Fourth Plenum in June 1989 following the military crackdown on the demonstrators. Jiang's handling of the demonstrators in Shanghai was reportedly one of the reasons he was selected to become Party

chief.)

¶9. (C) Li stated that Jiang had been "livid" when he heard that Du and Wu had ignored the Ministry of Culture's directive to fire Du and had run an even more controversial series of articles by Zhao's followers in the December issue.

Jiang later made his views known to the party's leadership, which contributed to this action against Du, Li said.

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